

GRACE PREFERRED TO GIFTS

NO. 2694

A SERMON
INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, SEPTEMBER 30, 1900
DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON
ON THURSDAY EVENING, SEPTEMBER 1, 1881

*“But covet earnestly the best gifts:
 and yet shew I unto you a more excellent way.”*
1 Corinthians 12:31

THERE are among us many who have recently joined the visible church of Christ. We have heartily welcomed them, and we desire always to entertain concerning them a joyous feeling of thankfulness that they have united with us. May they never have to regret it, and may the church of God never have to regret it, either! Dear friend, now that you have become a member of a Christian church, you should say to yourself, “What can I do for it? I have not come here merely to confess that I am saved, and there to let the matter stop, but I have enlisted in an army, that I may be a comrade with other soldiers, and be drilled, and trained, and equipped so that I may know how to march and to go forth to the battle.

I have come into the church to be a member of a body. What is my office? Every member has its own special office in the body, it is not there merely for its own comfort, but to be a help to the whole system of which it forms a part. What, then, can I do?” The question which we should each one ask of the Lord is that which Saul asked on the way to Damascus, “Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?”

When that question is once answered, and you, dear friend, know your proper place in the body of Christ, and have taken that place, whatever it may be, I think that your next desire will be that you may be in the best spiritual health—that you may be as vigorous as you can be—that, little though you ever may have to place at your Lord’s disposal, yet that the best use may be made of that little.

Even when we have done all those things that are commanded us, we shall still have to confess that we are unprofitable servants to our great Lord and Master, yet every one of us should pray that he may have as much to use for Christ as he can use, and that he may be as well fitted by the Holy Spirit for the Master’s service as it is possible that he can be. I would like to give to God the best that I have, and as that must be my whole spirit, soul, and body, aught I not to wish that my spirit, soul, and body should be at their very best?

I believe that many of you, dear friends, feel just as I do about this matter, and therefore, I shall not do wrong if I stir up the pure minds of those who have, through infinite mercy, given themselves to Christ, and say to them, “Make the most of yourselves: make the best of yourselves. ‘Covet earnestly the best gifts.’” But when I have said that, I shall have to add a caveat, and possibly, that caveat will rise into a word of encouragement and exhortation, “Yet show I unto you a more excellent way.”

There are two things in the text. There is, first, *an excellent way*, and secondly, there is “*a more excellent way*.”

I. First, there is AN EXCELLENT WAY. That is, for each individual Christian to “covet earnestly the best gifts.”

Paul is not speaking here concerning ordinary gifts as we see them in men of the world who are gifted in various ways, but he is referring to spiritual gifts—gifts which we dare to ask of God, gifts which we may expect the Spirit of God to bestow upon us, gifts which can be used in the church of Christ, and which we desire to possess in order that we may use them to the glory of God. We have not all the spiritual gifts which were entrusted to the first Christian church, I do not suppose it would have been wise that we should have had them.

The gift of miracles, for instance, if it had continued in the church, would have attracted the notice of men rather to the supernatural power of God than to the moral and spiritual power of Christ Jesus our Savior

as manifested through the Divine Spirit. This great, spiritual battle between right and wrong, which is being fought out in the arena of the world, God never intended to be fought out by mere might and power through the dazzling display of signs and wonders, but He resolved to win the victory by the effectual working of the Holy Spirit, according to that word unto Zerubbabel, "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the LORD of hosts." He intended to work in a spiritual manner upon the hearts of men, and therefore He dispensed with the aid of miracles, which had been necessary in the first stage of the church's growth.

You have no doubt often seen, in the case of a young tree when it is newly planted, that a stout stake is driven in by the side of it, and the sapling is tied to that stake, but when the tree grows bigger and stronger, it needs no such support. So has it been with the church of Christ on earth. At first it was feeble, and needed to be upheld and sustained by the aid of miracles, and wonders, and signs, but it needs that aid no longer.

Or as you have seen a ship in the Thames, being towed out to sea, and then, when it is fairly out upon the ocean, it is trusted to its own steam, or to the winds of heaven, so has it been with the Christian church. She was towed out of the narrow river of Judaism, on to the broad sea of later times, and now, the ever-blessed Spirit speeds her on her way without the tug of miracles.

How far the gifts of healing may still remain in the church. I should not like to be forced to say—either to say that they remain, lest any should be led into fanaticism, or to say that they are utterly gone, lest I should be denying some things which, at any rate, look like facts. God does, I doubt not, still hear the 'believing prayers of His servants concerning the sick, at least, in certain cases, and still should it be, as I judge, an ordinance to be observed, "Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord: and the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up."

Be that matter how it may, that is not the subject of this evening's discourse. The spiritual gifts, of which I am to speak, are those about which there can be no question that they do remain and are to be had by those who earnestly covet them, and diligently seek them.

One of the first of these gifts is *knowledge*. Dear friends, you who are beginners in the school of Christ, seek after more knowledge of the Word of God, and seek it very earnestly. You were brought to Christ, knowing very little except yourself a sinner and Christ a Savior, but now that you are saved, you should try to "comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fullness of God." "Search the Scriptures."

Be familiar with the doctrines of grace. Seek to be established in the faith, and as the apostle Peter says, "Be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear." I wish that all religious professors sought to be more deeply instructed by the Word read and by the Word heard, and by experience and meditation in the things of God.

Covet earnestly this spiritual gift of knowledge, and give yourselves diligently to the search after it, that you may become fully established in the principles of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. What a blessing you will be to others if you have much knowledge of the things of God! How often you will be able to help those who are in spiritual difficulties! How frequently you will be enabled to flash light upon the darkness of the ignorant, and to bring comfort to those who are in distress of soul! Solomon said, "Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom: and with all thy getting get understanding," which I would interpret here as an understanding of the Word of the Lord.

Next to that, dear friend, covet earnestly *the power to impart knowledge*. It is not everybody who possesses knowledge who can convey it to others. There is a habit, there is a fitness, there is a spirit, there is a mode, which men must obtain if they are to be "apt to teach." I have known some who have attempted to pour truth into very narrow-necked vessels, such as children are, but they have spilled far more than they have poured in.

Some are so confused in their proclamation of the truth that they are misunderstood. Some put the wrong truth foremost, and seem as if they would explain the mysteries of the Revelation before they have taught the simplicities of Matthew and the other Evangelists. They are perpetually putting the cart before the horse. Do not so, beloved, but ask the Holy Spirit to bestow upon you the gifts of teaching, that you may become, to

those whom God puts in your way, ready to communicate the truth, breaking the bread of life upon which you have yourself first fed.

With that gift of teaching, get, if you can, that other *blessed gift of personal address*, so as to be able to “button-hole” people, and to speak to them individually about their danger, and the way of escape from it. If you possibly can, do acquire the holy art of soul-winning, it is the finest piece of Christian education that I know of—the power to hunt for men as hunters seek their game—to track them to their hiding-places—to stop up the holes in which they seek to get shelter, and to take them in Gospel nets, and bring them as willing captives to your Lord and Master. This spiritual hunting is grand work, may you be well skilled in it! It is a very special gift, covet it earnestly. I am sure that I covet it greatly. There are some here who have it in a very marked degree, I would that all God’s people had this precious spiritual gift.

Then there is what we call “gift in prayer”—*the gift of public prayer*—covet that also, dear brethren. Some excellent members of the church never pray in public, and I do not blame them. God forbid that we should do so! Still, I am inclined to think that a very large number of our dumb people would have been able to speak and pray in public if they had only begun earlier in their Christian life, and I also believe that they would be able to do so now if they were not quite so proud. “Oh!” say you, “that is rather a hard word.” Well, brother, you are afraid that you would break down, are you not? Now, if you would not mind doing so, and would break down two or three times, you would do well enough afterwards.

Some of you, possibly, are afraid to pray even in your own family circle because you think that you would not find suitable words. Now, suppose that you were to tell the Lord that you are afraid you cannot use appropriate language, and ask Him to help you, and then suppose you can only utter half a dozen sentences, if your children come and complain that the family prayer was too short, it will be a novel sort of complaint, I have heard sometimes about its being too long, and if ever you hear me complain of anybody breaking down in the prayer meeting, I beg you to mark that word, for it will be a remarkable thing for me to say.

On the contrary, I am glad to hear a brother break down, I wish some of you would do so. Some of our young friends, when they break down, give new life to the meeting. They put real feeling into it, for we are all alive with sympathy towards them.

Their breaking down does us far more good than the long, prosy prayers that rather weary us than help us. When some trembling brother stands up in the meeting, when he pours out the requests of his heart, with simplicity and earnestness, in a way that suits us all, we thank God for him, and we feel that we have been as much refreshed by the few minutes of his prayer as we should have been by the best possible discourse. So, dear friend, covet earnestly the gift of public prayer, for it tends greatly to the edification of your fellow-believers, if you have the gift in any measure, cultivate it, and seek to possess more and more of it.

And what a precious gift is that of *preaching the Word!* Thank God that this gift is still preserved in the midst of the church, for the pulpit, rightly filled, is the tower of the flock. It is the very bastion of the walls of Zion. As long as her watchmen shall stand there, and cry aloud in God’s name, the foe shall not be able to enter, or to break her peace. There are many men, who have this gift, who do not cultivate it, and do not use it as much as they ought. I say not that all preachers should become regular pastors of the flocks, but we have among us many men of business, who could speak for Christ here and there, in the streets, or in a cottage, or in large assemblies, when they might be called upon, and who ought to endeavor, as much as in them lies, to get the power of speech that they may speak well for Jesus Christ. In this sense, dear brethren, “covet earnestly the best gifts.”

Another very desirable spiritual gift is that of *wisdom to direct tried souls*. I have known, and you have known, some who have been wise in this sense quite early in life, and others we have known—the gift usually comes in this way—who have become wise through experience. They are not easily deceived, they are men of steadfastness, they know what they believe, and they know why they believe it, and when a difficult case, which has puzzled many, is brought before them, you are astonished to see what a discerning spirit God has given to them, so that they at once indicate the right course to be taken. They can discover the clue of the maze, and those who follow it come to the desired point very speedily.

Now, these persons are invaluable in the church—matronly women, and venerable men, who can speak a word in season to him that is weary, or a word of warning to him that is ready to slip with his feet, and who

can do it so kindly that no offense is taken at what they say, and who can do it at the right time, and in the right tone and spirit, so that the message is regarded, and is not forgotten.

I pray God to raise up many in our midst who shall have this very precious gift. I have sometimes heard people say, in disparagement of certain churches, that "they take in a lot of young people—mere boys and girls." Yes, and we should like to take in a lot more of that sort. We are always open to receive any quantity of Christ's lambs, for, in due season they will grow into sheep, and so the flock will be perpetuated.

I came to London just about the time when good Mr. Joseph Irons, of Camberwell, had finished his ministry. I had read how some people complained that, in his early days, he had received a great many young people into his church, and when I came to New Park Street, I had the high privilege of finding these young people turned into old, experienced believers, and amongst the first who came to join with us, when the standard was lifted up, was a goodly number of these gracious men and women—nearly all of whom are now with God—they became pillars in the midst of our church, and they contributed greatly to its stability and its usefulness. They were some of the boys and girls whom young Joseph Irons received into the church, only, having been boys and girls perhaps forty or fifty years previously, they were not very boyish and girlish when I knew them.

What a comfort those who have long been in Christ are to the minister! What a help those who have much of the spirit of their Master are to their fellow-members! What a terror they are to the ungodly! The devil himself cannot move these people from their steadfastness, for God is with them, and therefore they are so strong that they overcome even the wicked one.

Alas! it is always true that we have not many fathers, but when we do get some fathers and mothers in Israel, they are a great strength and a great treasure to us, and God is to be thanked for them. I want you young people to mind that, as you grow older, you grow wiser, and to see to it that you do endeavor so to live near to God, and to walk before Him, as to get deeper and deeper into the very heart of the truth of God, so that, in after years, you may have the blessed spiritual gift of wisdom which will enable you to guide others.

Meanwhile, there is a gift which comes to us without our using any direct means to obtain it—a sort of outgrowth from a godly character, namely, *influence*. I will not attempt to define what it is, but you know well enough when you feel it. A man stands up to pray in the prayer meeting, and a stranger who may be present thinks, "What a delightful prayer that is, yet nobody seems to be affected by it!" Then another person stands up to pray, he is not very fluent, and the stranger does not think that his prayer is at all remarkable, but he notices that the people appear to feel the force of it. Why is that? The difference is in the man who presents the prayer, there is an influence exerted by him which the other man does not possess.

I believe that there are some men who, if they were very ill, and could only be borne from their beds to say half a dozen sentences, would work more good in the hearts of those who heard them than some others would do by half a score of sermons. To quote a living instance—I may venture to do so, for I do not suppose that the brother whose name I am about to mention will ever know that I did it. When I listened to dear Mr. George Muller, I thought, "Well now, that is very simple talk, a child from the Sabbath school might almost say all that he has said." Yet I was edified to the highest degree because there was George Muller's influence at the back of all that he said. That was the secret of its power.

I knew something of his holy life, his power with God in prayer, his faith, and the great work which it had enabled him to accomplish, so the simplest sentence seemed to drop into my soul with weight, and power, and unction, for there was the influence of the good man behind it all, and glad enough was I to sit at his feet, and listen to his gracious talk. I do not recollect anything he said that was at all striking, or fresh, or new, or original, it was because the man had been with God, and had his Lord's presence continually with him, that his words came with unction and power.

Now, brethren, this is a spiritual gift which we ought earnestly to covet. Oh, that we might be spiritually like Asher! You know that part of Asher's blessing was, "Let him dip his foot in oil!" What was the consequence of the fulfillment of that blessing. Why, that, wherever he went, he left an oily mark behind him.

"What sort of a minister have you now?" I once asked a person, who came from a place where the new minister had been for, perhaps, a year or two, and I had known the previous one—"What sort of a minister have you now?" The answer I received was, "Well, sir, we have a man of this kind, if he comes into your

house for only ten minutes, you know that he has been there." That is the sort of man I should like to be, and the sort of woman I wish you to be, dear sister—so that, when you go even for a little time into the company of others, they may know that you have been there.

Ay, and when you do not go anywhere, when you are lying upstairs in bed sick, may you have such an influence about you that your power shall be felt far away, and those who have been serving God shall serve Him the better, and the more earnestly, and the more joyfully, because they remember you, and your influence, by God's blessing upon it, shall be quickening and strengthening to them. This was the kind of influence which Paul wielded even from his prison at Rome, for many of the brethren, waxing confident by his bonds, were moved to serve God all the better because their fellow soldier was compelled to be absent from the fight.

All these that I have mentioned are spiritual gifts, therefore, seek them, covet them earnestly, for they will be a blessing to you, they will be a blessing to others, and they will bring glory to God. That is an excellent way for you to walk in.

II. But in the second place, I have to speak to you, as the apostle writes to these Corinthians, concerning "A MORE EXCELLENT WAY."

Silver is good, but gold is better. A certain way may be excellent, but another way may be more excellent still. Gifts are good, but grace is better. Get gifts, spiritual gifts, but also get grace, and above all, get the best grace, the noblest grace, the greatest grace, that is, love, for love to God, and love to your fellow-men, and love to the church of God—this is "a more excellent way."

Get much grace then, first, *because you need it*. I do not know that you need gifts. Perhaps, dear friends, you are not lacking in gifts. You require some for the service of your Lord, but perhaps you have sufficient, and it may be that, if you had more, they would be an encumbrance to you, but I am sure that you need grace. A man may be really better off with one talent than with five, but he cannot be better off with one measure of grace than with five.

The more grace we have, the better, for thus we shall be "rich toward God," and this kind of riches brings no sorrow with it. You need a great deal more grace than you think you do, something is going to happen in which you will need great grace. Perhaps there is to be more trial for you, possibly, there is to be more prosperity, and certainly you will need more grace then. But whatever is to come, get more grace, because you will need it.

I must warn you young converts, and also all other believers, that one reason why you will need grace is, because the devil will be certain, sooner or later, to assail you with fierce temptations. If ever there is a railway made to a place where there are no temptations, I suspect that they will have to run a great many trains there, but will there ever be discovered such a country? Never, beneath the cope of heaven, as long as we are here, we must be tried, and I am always slow to advise people to try to change their trials for any others. I remember the world's poet speaks of a something that—

*"Makes us rather bear these ills we have,
Than fly to others that we know not of."*

The burden which I have to carry, I have carried so long that it begins to fit my shoulders, and I would not like to change it for yours, even though yours may be lighter than mine, for there is an awkward corner about yours that perhaps fits the shape of your back, but it would not so well fit mine, it would be more burdensome to me than it is to you, and my lead would be more weighty to you than it is to me. We had better let the temptations that we now have be bravely conquered than suppose that, by changing our adversaries, we could secure a victory.

If you were to get quite alone, as our Savior was in the wilderness, with nothing but the wild beasts round about you, you could not shut out the devil even then. Forty days He had for meditation, and prayer, and fasting, yet there was the devil waiting to assail Him again and again. So I repeat that not even solitude, if the lonely hours were spent in prayer, and fasting, and watching, could secure us immunity from temptation, it must and will attack us.

We ought to be very grateful when, for a time, we are free from it, but we ought still to be on our watchtower, for, at any moment, that adversary, whose noiseless flight no ear has ever heard, that relentless foe—who is not to be perceived by the eye, for he is an invisible spirit who may descend from the air of which he is the prince, and alight at our side—may begin to tempt us, though we are fresh from our knees, and covered with the dew of communion with God. The mercy is, that active and vigilant as Satan is, the grace of God is more than a match for him, so again I urge you to get more grace because you need it in resisting temptation.

Next, get more grace, *because you can have it*. There is no limit there. Perhaps, even though you covet earnestly the best gifts, there may be some gifts which you will never receive. A brother may wish to preach, and yet he may never be able to do so. Another may desire to pray in public, and yet, perhaps, he may never be bold enough to open his mouth in the assembly. One may long for wisdom that he may guide others, yet, it may never be granted to him. But all can have grace. That is a fountain which is ever flowing, a river from which all who will may drink.

There are, in certain places, little ponds by the roadside, and as you pass by you may see notices giving warning that no dogs may be washed there. Go down to the River Thames, and see whether you can find there any notice of that kind. There stands a bullock, knee-deep in the stream, and drinks all he wants, and all kinds of creatures come and wash or swim in the water. There is such a plenty of it that nobody is refused. So is it with the grace of God, it is a vast river which cannot be exhausted, and therefore the divine invitation is, “Let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.” So get more grace, dear friend, because you can have it.

Get more grace, also, *because you will be sure to be useful then*. I am not sure that you would be more useful if you had more talent. There are some men who have too many talents ever to be of much use to the church or the world. You may think that this is a strange thing for me to say, but I really mean it. They seem to have such big sails that their boat cannot sail, it capsizes. They need to have bigger boats, and more of the ballast or burden of trouble to carry, and then, peradventure, they might bear their huge sails in safety.

It is not every gift that makes a man useful, but I am sure that all grace makes us useful. Gift is often barren, but grace is always fruitful. You can bury gift in a napkin, but who can put grace in a cloth and hide it away? Grace is one of the things that cannot be buried, it is a living thing, a burning thing, and it must make you useful if you have it, therefore, seek to have more and more of it.

Get more grace, dear brother, *because so you will assuredly glorify God*. I am not sure that you would always glorify God if you had more gifts. How little glory God gets often out of great gifts! I recollect how, when I began to preach the Gospel, I used to wish that Milton had been a preacher. I often thought what a grand thing it would have been if Shakespeare had been a minister, with his wonderful versatility of talent, and poetry of expression, I thought he would have been a very powerful preacher. But afterwards, I almost thanked God that we had not any Miltos or Shakespeares preaching. It is far better to have men of quite another stamp, so that the hearers may not be carried away either with poetical expressions or with an excess of worldly knowledge and ability.

Those fishermen, over by the Sea of Galilee, who did not know much except about fish, were more fit to preach the Gospel than were those fine gentlemen at Athens, who thought they knew everything that was to be known in all the world. They were too full of worldly wisdom to learn the wisdom that cometh down from above, but those fishermen were just simple souls who could believe what they were told, and who could repeat to others what Christ had said to them, and that is the kind of instrument that Christ generally uses in the effecting of His gracious purposes of mercy.

So, beloved, covet earnestly much grace, for grace always glorifies God. There is not a grain of grace in the world which does not reflect the light of His face from whom it came. Gifts may be prostituted to the vilest purposes, but grace—the grace of God—always brings glory to His holy name. Therefore, while you “covet earnestly the best gifts,” “yet show I unto you a more excellent way.” That is, seek to obtain continually more grace.

Now, in closing my discourse, let me tell you, beloved brothers and sisters, why this is “a more excellent way.” First, you may have gifts, and yet you may be still only natural men and women. The highest gifts of preaching that, ever met have had, or of poetry, by which they could write choice hymns, did not prove that

they had passed from death unto life. They might still be in the gall of bitterness, and be enemies to God as Judas was, though they had very remarkable and special gifts as Judas had, for no doubt, he wrought miracles, and in the name of Christ did many wonderful works. Gifts are but natural things, and they are given to the children of the flesh, but grace is supernatural, and whenever it is bestowed upon us, it proves that we are the children of God after the Spirit.

Remember, also, that you may have gifts, and yet you may still be under the power of sin. Alas! how many, who have the brightest natural gifts, are still using them in the cause of Satan, and even some, who have spiritual gifts of the kind I have described, yet since they are not gracious as well as gifted, are doing mischief rather than good to the cause of Christ.

To my great grief, I have known some who had a considerable gift in prayer, and who seemed to have a good knowledge of the Word, yet who, all the while, were living in some secret sin, and by and by, it was found out, and they went out from us because they were never really of us. You may have the most brilliant gifts, and appear to be notable Christian workers, yet for all that, you may still be under the dominion of sin. And so it comes to pass that a man may have all gifts, and all knowledge, and all faith, so that he could remove mountains, and he may even give his body to be burned, yet if he has not love—if he has not grace, he is still under the wrath of God.

It must be an awful thing to preach like an apostle, and yet to be cast into hell like a devil—to be able to instruct others, and yet never to enter into the kingdom—to be able to pray in public, and yet never have any part or lot in the things of Christ, no union to Him, no salvation by Him. O brothers, do you understand and realize this? You may have great gifts, and yet go to hell, therefore, while they are worth the having under proper conditions, they are not one tenth so much worth the having as grace is, for he who has grace is not under the curse or condemnation of the law, or under the power of sin. Grace saves men, but all the gifts in the world, heaped together, cannot do that.

Note, next, that gifts bring corresponding responsibility with them, so they may even make it harder for a man to be saved, but grace saves the man. If I have ten talents, then I have a tenfold necessity upon me to be diligent in putting them out to interest. When men boast of their talents, what fools they are! It is as though the pack horse should glory in the load he has to carry! Do you think a cab horse is proud because he has to drag along a four-wheeler, and perhaps five people? Does he think himself more greatly privileged than an animal that only has to carry his rider?

No, yet that is the case of the gifted person, for, the more gift, the more load, the more weight, the more burden, so gift is not a thing to be eager after, it is grace that we need, for the more grace, the more strength of wing to mount with, the more fleetness of foot to run in the ways of God. Gift is but an addition to our load, but grace is strength with which to carry it. Covet the load if you may honor your Master by carrying it for Him, but far more, covet the grace which shall enable you to bear it to His glory.

Further, gifts bring many men into danger, but grace never does. Gifted men are often in peril of being proud, but who, that is what he should be, is ever proud of his grace? If it be true grace, it will humble him. Gifted men, especially those who have great intellectual gifts, are very apt to be sophistical, and unwilling to receive the simple Gospel. Some people, who have very big heads, and whose hearts are not as large as they might be, are bothered half their lives with doubts that never perplex those who, having more grace, accept, whatever they find in the Word of God.

It is a great gift, no doubt, to have a clear brain, to have an insight into deep mysteries, and to be able to solve difficult problems, yet I do not know that I am particularly covetous of it. I would prefer to cry, with Thomas, "My Lord and my God," though I would rather come to Christ in a different spirit from that of Thomas, for "blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed." Childlike faith is a diamond, and the faith that comes by reason is often, if it be a diamond at all, a very small one with a great flaw in it, and therefore not so good for reflecting the brightness of the pure light of truth.

But grace does not bring us into any dangers, it neither puffs up nor yet unsettles. Therefore, while you covet the best gifts, covet grace yet more. Alas! alas! how many have had gifts, and have been made top-heavy by them! Their heads have been swimming through the height to which they have attained, while grace has kept the humble believer pursuing the even tenor of his way, doing good all his days, enjoying

peace with God, and receiving an abundant entrance into the joy of his Master whom he faithfully served according to his ability.

Recollect, also, dear friends, that some may receive gifts, yet those gifts will not be tokens of God's love to them at all, for he may only have given them with a view to other people. Possibly, you hand to a porter at your door a parcel of valuables to carry, but that is no proof of your love to him, it is a very handsome present that you are sending to a friend upon his birthday. The love-token is to the person who gets it, not to the porter who carries it.

I may come here tonight, and be nothing but God's porter to bring precious treasures to your souls, and in the case of many a minister, or many a Sunday school teacher, it may be no token of love that God gives them His messages to carry. They are only the go-betweens, the porters, the love token is to those who receive it.

How I dread the thought, that I should ever be among you simply like a butcher, as I have seen him stand at his great block of wood, chopping up meat for all who come! yet all the while, he does not eat any of it himself. Perhaps he is a serving-man, whose wages are scanty, so that he gets but little meat for himself, it is a poor portion if one has to be a butcher, and yet is not himself able to feed, he is like a cook who scarcely tastes the dainties that she makes, and perhaps has no care to do so, but only makes them and serves them up for other people.

It is a dreadful thing, in spiritual matters, to be nothing but God's go-between—a ship that carries a rich cargo, but the captain of the vessel does not own a sliver of all that is on board. It all belongs to somebody else, and he is but the carrier. Oh, remember, you who have great gifts, but no grace, are only like big ships with high sails, you are only God's carriers, and have no part nor lot in the matter, while he who gets grace is an heir of God, he has the power, the privilege, the right, to become a son of God.

Recollect also, dear friends, that though you covet gifts, and receive them, you will lose them one day. All the wisdom that a man has acquired he may lose in an instant by a crack from a stone on his skull. It is a great thing to have a good education, clear thought, and abilities for usefulness, yet a slight accident in a railway carriage may make a man as helpless as an imbecile, but blessed be God, all the railway accidents in the world cannot take grace from us.

No, neither on earth, nor in heaven, nor in hell, is there anyone who can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. If you have grace, you will keep it, and it will keep you. But neither can you keep your gifts, nor can your gifts keep you, therefore is grace infinitely to be preferred to the most excellent of gifts.

Remember, yet again, that gifts cannot comfort a man when he is in deep depression of spirit, when he is sick, and especially when he is near to death. Many a man, lying on a sick-bed, has found comfort in the grace which God has given him, but there never was one who found comfort in his gifts. What a mighty preacher Paul was! Yet he wrote thus concerning one thought that crossed his mind, "Lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway."

Ah! we may live for fifty years or more, and gather a great church, and do much good, but there is not a speck of the small dust of comfort in it all, for we recollect that God may have simply used us as builders use their scaffolds as long as they want them, and when the house is built, they take the scaffold down, and put the material away. God may use us in the same way if we have gifts without grace, but if we have grace, it will not be so with us.

Grace unites us to Christ, it makes us living stones in the building of which He is the foundation. When we come to be sick, grace brings us the promises. Grace looks to Christ, grace gives us hope, grace gives us the foretaste and pledge of glory, and especially is it so with that sweet and blessed grace of love. The man who is full of grace, though he has not a solitary talent, and is all unknown, yet is a happy and blessed man, in poverty and in obscurity, in sickness and in death, he is blessed because his soul is full of the majestic grace of love divine.

Thus have I set before you, dear friends, the "more excellent way." God help you to run in it, and may you have much grace, for our Lord Jesus Christ's sake! Amen.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—813, 668, 649

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